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ABSTRACT

Examined were the self-concept and attitudes of 88 learning disabled (LD adolescents related to school, teacher, family relationships, and specific learning disabilities. Ss were administered a 59-item questionnaire. Among findings were that LD students indicated positive experiences and attitudes of peers, regular and special classroom teachers, and family; and LD students did not perceive many of the negative social relationships discussed in the literature or the negative personal, behavioral, and learning characteristics attributed to them by the few studies in this area. (SBH)

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ATTITUDES OF THE ADOLESCENT LEARNING DISABLED STUDENT RELATED TO SCHOOL RELATIONSHIPS, TEACHER RELATIONSHIPS, FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS AND LEARNING

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ATTITUDES OF THE ADOLESCENT LEARNING DISABLED STUDENT RELATED TO SCHOOL REALTIONSHIPS, TEACHER RELATIONSHIPS, FAMILY RELATIONSIPS AND LEARNING

L. Kay Hartwell Myers Douglas E. Wiseman

In a recent issue of the Journal of Learning Disabilities (Bryan, 1978) it was noted that despite federal regulations which define L D children strictly in terms of intellect and achievement, sensitive observers recognize the social and emotional complications these children face. The article further stated that with increased mainstreaming, the L D child's social skills will be severely tested and our ability to recognize the nonacademic aspects of L D should provide each child with a more understanding and supportive environment.

Many professionals have attempted to describe the specific characteristics of students who have been identified as learning disabled (Russell, 1974; Strothers, 1971; Wissink, 1972; Bryan, 1974, 1976, 1978). The descriptors, for the most part, cover a wide range of negative attributes and most of the negative behaviors listed in the literature are attributed to young L D children and generalized to the adolescent. The authors of this paper, however, believe that characteristics of adolescents as related to home, school, and specific learning problems would be quite different from those found in children. Some of the characteristics descriptive of young L D children include hyperactivity, distractability, agressiveness and peer relationship problems to mention a few, (Bryan, 1978; Leviton and Kirlay, 1975, Warner, Thrapp and Walsh, 1975; Ianacone and Stodden, 1975), may not be present in the L D adolescent who has learned to control, cope and modify behaviors through time, experience and the social conformity of many teenagers.

The literature related to characteristics of the L D adolescent is not only minimal but lacks empirical validation necessary to generalize to large populations. This is due in part, to lack of emphasis, until recently in programming for the secondary school age learning disabled student and the problem of agreement on identification procedures and varied criteria used by different researchers in observing this population of students.

Characteristics delineated by researchers related to the adolescent with learning disabilities include: (1) major cognitive deficits, (2) excessive day-

dreaming, (3) high distractibility, (4) severe underachievement, (5) inflexibility toward ideas and activities, (6) perceptual confusions, (7) hyperactivity, (8) short attention span, (9) general body or motoric awkwardness, (10) inadequacy in dealing with symbols, (11) secondary emotional problems, (12) immaturity, (13) physically smaller than peers, (14) frustration with self, (15) inner rage, (16) passive or active agression, feelings of inadequacy, (17) alienation from their families, (18) delinquency, (19) truancy, (20 confusion, (21) difficulty in generalizing from experience, (22) problems in modifying behavior, (23) difficulty in choosing from alternatives, (24) tendency to make snap decisions and judgments, (25) few established principles or ideals and (26) yields quickly to immediate pressure (Maietta, 1970; Strothers, 1971; Jones, 1972; Mauser, 1974; Russell, 1974; Siegel, (1974); Bryan, 1974 and others).

Again, without a clearly defined population and without clearly defined criteria, systematic investigation into behavioral and learning characteristics of the adolescent with learning disabilities will be difficult.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss and review research findings related to the self-concept and attitudes of the learning disabled adolescent related to school, teacher, family relationships and special learning difficulties as perceived by the teenager having been classified as learning disabled.

Description of the Population

The population of this study consisted of 88 students attending public high schools in the metropolitan Phoenix area. All of the students had IQs above 85 on an individually administered intellegence test and were receiving a minimum of one hour, daily assistance from a teacher certified to teach learning disabled adolescents. Thus, the subjects were adolescents who had been identified as L D by the special services staff in the cooperating school districts, who were receiving special help from an L D specialist to remediate learning disorders and who were spending most of their time in the regular content classes of the secondary school. All the students participating in the study met the criteria for placement in L D classes according to state and local guidelines.

No attempt was made to differentiate responses based on sex or race. However, most of the students were caucausian and male. The students were not required to identify themselves by name on the questionnaire. All students participated in the study voluntarily and were not assisted in responding to the questionnaire.

Other demographic data includes the following:

(1) 88.6% of the respondents were between the ages of 15 and 18 years with 9.1% being over 18 years of age.

(2) 29% of the students had spent less than one year in a special L D class, 32.2% had participated one to 2 years, 24.1% had been enrolled three to four years in L D classes and 15% had been enrolled in an L D class for five or more years.

(3) The majority of students (62.8%) indicated they had attended only one high school.

(4) More than half of the students (51.1%) were first referred for special education services between the 9th and 12th grades, with the next highest percentage of students (23.9) being referred in grades seven through eight.

(5) With respect to attendance at school, 39.8% indicated that they had missed more than 30 days in any one school year.

Description of the Instrument

The instrument used to assess the subjects attitudes and self-concept was a fifty-nine item questionnaire (see Appendix, Table 1) developed by the authors. Each item was in statement form and attempted to assess characteristics of L D secondary students as determined by those studies in the literature mentioned previously that dealt specifically with the secondary school L D population. The statements covered opinions in five areas: school relationships, regular classroom teacher relationships, special teacher relationships, family relationships and learning and related activities. The student was asked to respond using a seven point Likert type scale, with 1 representing a "never" response and the 7 representing an "always" response.

The questionnaire was previewed by University personnel in the area of learning disabilities, public school regular class and special education teachers, thirty-eight L D graduate students, and twenty adolescent L D students. In addition a pilot study was conducted and recommendations from the above activities led to the deletion, addition or rewording of items. Reliability for internal consistency was done using the split half correlation method. The reliability coefficient ranged from .43 to .76.

Results of the Study.

SCHOOL RELATIONSHIPS

The first area we will review relates to attitudes of the secondary school age learning disabled student and school relationships. A number of studies have reported that handicapped children, including the learning disabled, in regular class placements are rejected by their peers (Jones, 1972; Bryan, 1976). In a study by Bryan (1974), learning disabled youngsters received significantly more votes on a scale of Social Rejection and fewer votes on a scale of Social Attraction than comparison children. Bryan's study confirms the findings of an investigation by Black (1975) reporting that feelings of inadequacy and poor self concept are secondary to the academic failure and inability to meet the expectations of parents, peers, and teachers. Others have reported the L D student as having "feelings of alienation".

In the responses by 88 adolescent L D students in the investigation of attitudes related to school relationships, the authors' study does not support these findings. In fact, the majority of the students surveyed indicated that regular class students seldom or never make fun of them at school (88.4%); are not ridiculed by regular students (81.6%); are not ignored by regular class students (80.4%); and are not bullied by regular students (90.8%). Also, 74.7% of the respondents indicated that they seldom or never fight or quarrel with others at school. In fact, the majority of the students agree that they feel good about the work they are accomplishing at school. A majority of the respondents, 78.8% indicated they get along well with other special class students but almost equally as well with regular class students.

It would appear that the majority of L D students participating in this study perceive their school relationships as positive and feel they are accomplishing positive results in their school work.

TEACHER RELATIONSHIPS (Regular Classroom)

The concept of the self-fulfilling prophecy can be widely read in the literature, but the premise remains that many teachers, counsellors and others who work with "special" children, have stereotypes that reflect expectations and directly relate to the quality and quantity of interaction with students who have learning and/or behavioral problems. In an investigation by Jones, (1972), teachers, counselors and undergraduates exhibited clear stereotypes about the characteristics and attitudes of children classified as disadvantaged. In his

study he suggests two problems that need further study:

(1) Insufficient attention has been given to the fact that some of the labels used imply deficiencies and shortcomings which generate attendent problems of lowered self concept and expectations which interfere with children's optimum growth and development. And,

(2) No systematic inquiry has been conducted into children's perceptions of the labels and special services which are offered them.

If handicapped students are to "survive" in the mainstream of education, positive support from regular classroom teachers is critical both to the self-concept and progress of the handicapped student. In the authors' investigation, the second area studied related to the L D adolescent's attitudes toward the regular classroom teacher. The majority of the students (66.7%) felt that their regular classroom teachers cared about them but felt that the special education teacher treated them with more understanding and acceptance. However, the L D adolescent clearly indicated that the regular class teacher really seemed to like them and make an effort to help them solve their problems. They do not feel that regular classroom teachers talk down to them, nor do they seem to indicate that they have trouble in talking to regular classroom teachers about problems. A large number of the students (65.4%) indicated they felt regular teachers treated them with the same understanding and acceptance as students without learning problems.

The findings of this study in relation to attitudes toward the regular classroom teacher is suprising in light of discussion of the labeling process and the negative affects on teacher attitudes. The findings also do not substantiate the results of group interviews by the authors in respect to adolescent attitudes concerning classroom teachers. The results may also reflect an emphasis on in-service training for regular classroom teachers related to skill development in providing alternative programs in the regular classroom for handicapped students or other factors unknown to the authors. This area of investigation will hopefully encourage others to pursue identifing factors related to the regular classroom teacher's attitude's and support of the adolescent L D student.

TEACHER RELATIONSHIPS (Special Education)

Another area of inquiry focused around the attitudes of L D adolescents related to their special education teachers. The respondents in this investigation clearly indicated by an overwhelming majority that the special class teacher likes

L D students, makes an effort to help them solve their problems and has assisted the L D student in recognizing and coping with problems. In fact 64% of the students would like to have the special education teacher assist in all of their subjects. The students also clearly indicate that they do not perceive the special class teacher talking down to them and they do not have trouble talking to the special teacher about their problesm. The data confirms previous findings in that the student perceives the special class teacher as treating them with slightly more understanding than the regular classroom teacher. This is not surprising in that a student usually has only one special teacher in which to relate in the academic setting as compared with three or more regular classroom teachers during a school day. The data seems to indicate the L D adolescent has a strong, positive attitude toward their special class teacher.

FAMILY REALTIONSHIPS

Parents of handicapped children are often confronted by educators with the idea that they do harm to their children by having unrealistic expectations, comparing the handicapped child unfairly with peers and siblings and putting too much stress on issues or problems at school. The data from this study does not substantiate these ideas. The majority of the 88 L D adolescents do not seem to perceive their parents comparing them with siblings as it relates to school, or that parents expect too much from them at school, or that they must compete in school with other members of the family. The majority of the students do not become angry with their parents about problems or issues regarding school. Seventy-three percent (73%) of the students are satisfied with the support their parents show toward their effort at school and feel that their parents like them as a person (81%). Seventy-one percent (71%) also indicate they get along well with siblings at home.

In general, the students participating in this study seem to indicate that their parents like them, do not put undue pressure on them about school work and seem to get along with their siblings.

LEARNING AND RELATED ACTIVITIES

The final area of the investigation was related to learning and related activities. Many of the statements were formulated around the characteristics discussed earlier as being those characteristics descriptive of L D adolescents in the literature.

When asked to respond whether or not they daydream frequently in school when they should be studying, the L D adolescents in this study responded with a somewhat equal distribution across the continum of one through seven with a mean value of 3.96. Other mean values indicating approximate equal distribution across the continum include the following statements:

--You have problems remembering what you see, such as new words or room numbers.

--You often become frustrated because of your learning problems.

--You have a difficult time stopping an activity when you should begin another.

--You get along better with special class students that with regular students.

--You have a short attention span in your school work.

On the other hand, L D adolescents indicated that other students seldom or never call them names because they have difficulty in school, do not have problems changing from one activity to another, do not have difficulty focusing in on one task or activity, do not have trouble doing some of the physical activities they would like to do, do not skip classes when work becomes too difficult, do not miss school frequently and do not skip classes more often when they are angry or upset about that class.

The majority of the L D adolescents responding to this attitudinal questionnaire (80%) preceive themselves as being successful persons in the future and try to establish principles or ideals for themselves (60.9%)

In this section of the questionnaire some of the behavioral characteristics attributed to the secondary school age learning disabled student are not substantiated by the student as he perceives himself in relation to the characteristics described in the literature. Other characteristics appear to be evenly distributed across the continuum and none of the negative behaviors are overwhelmingly supported by this self-perceptual attitudinal survey.

SUMMARY

The data from this attitudinal questionnaire with 88 adolescent L D public school students indicates positive experiences and attitudes of peers, regular and special classroom teachers and family as perceived by the secondary school age students. They do not perceive many of the negative social relationships

discussed in the literature or the negative personal behavioral and learning characteristics attributed to them by the few studies in this area.

The authors suggest that empirical studies be conducted in the areas of school relationships, teacher relationships, family relationships and learning characteristics and related learning activities. We further suggest that in order to contribute significantly to the knowledge of the characteristics of the L D adolescent population, that the population be well defined in the study with stated criteria for the population studied. And finally, that attitudes and perceptions of regular and special class teachers as well as parents of the adolescent, L D student be correlated to determine if there are significant attitudinal differences between the groups. This type of study will assist in counseling of students, inservice training of teachers, placement of students and in the training of parents to communicate more effectively with and for their adolescent who has problems in learning or achievement.

The authors do not propose that the findings of this investigation represent all L D adolescents, but given some evidence of a more supportive environment in the secondary school and in the home than was generally thought to be present. Hopefully this investigation will help us to better understand the adolescent who has been identified as learning disabled and provide a basis for further investigation.

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Table 1

Results of an Attitude Survey completed by 88 L.D. adolescents.
(Included are the items, mean values and percent categories of responses)

Item	Mean Value	Percent Categories of Responses						
School Relationships		Never		Seldom		Occasionally		Always
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Regular students make fun of you at school	2.04	53.5	15.1	19.8	4.7	2.3	1.2	3.5
2. You get along well with other special students in your program.	5.52	6.9	0.0	8.0	1.1	25.3	19.5	39.1
3. You feel good about the work you are accomplishing in school.	5.35	8.0	1.1	8.0	5.7	23.0	14.9	39.1
4. You are often ridiculed by regular students at school	2.19	54.0	18.4	9.2	4.6	5.7	2.3	5.7
5. Your work has improved because of the assistance you have received in a special class.	5.33	10.5	1.2	8.1	3.5	17.4	19.8	39.5
6. Regular students ignore you while you are at school.	2.19	58.6	10.3	11.5	6.9	2.3	5.7	4.6
7. You often fight and/or quarrel with others in school.	2.51	49.4	13.8	11.5	3.4	11.5	3.4	6.9
8. Some regular students bully you at school.	1.72	71.3	10.3	9.2	2.3	2.3	0.0	4.6
9. You are often sent to the principal's office for inappropriate behavior in class.	2.04	68.8	6.9	10.3	1.1	4.6	0.0	9.2
10. When you are sent to the principal's office you know the reason.	4.10	33.3	1.2	11.9	3.6	7.1	10.7	32.1
11. School for you is not an enjoyable experience.	3.75	20.9	9.3	19.8	11.6	16.3	5.8	16.3
12. You get along better with special class students than with regular students.	4.17	14.0	2.3	17.4	25.6	18.6	3.5	18.6

Item	Mean Value	Percent Categories of Responses						
		Never		Seldom		Occasionally		Always
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Teacher Relationships (Regular)								
1. Your regular teacher really cares about you in school.	4.67	7.0	9.3	16.3	10.5	19.8	8.1	29.1
2. Regular teachers treat you with more understanding and acceptance than your special teacher.	3.67	20.9	11.6	17.4	15.1	16.3	1.2	17.4
3. Your regular teachers really seem to like you.	4.95	8.1	7.0	8.1	12.8	19.8	10.5	33.7
4. Your regular teachers make a real effort to help you solve your problems.	4.47	9.3	8.1	14.0	16.3	22.1	7.0	23.3
5. Your regular teachers talk down to you.	2.68	47.1	9.4	10.6	11.8	9.4	5.9	5.9
6. Regular teachers treat you with the same understanding and acceptance as students without learning problems.	4.58	15.1	4.7	12.8	16.3	10.5	7.0	33.7
7. You have trouble talking to your regular teacher about problems.	3.64	34.9	8.1	5.8	7.0	17.4	7.0	19.8
Teacher Relationships (Special)								
1. Your special teacher really cares about you in school.	6.10	3.4	0.0	2.3	4.5	13.6	19.3	56.8
2. The special teacher works with your regular teachers to help you.	5.22	8.1	2.3	7.0	14.0	18.6	10.5	39.5
3. The special teacher makes a real effort to help you solve your problems.	5.96	4.5	0.0	5.7	2.3	13.6	19.3	54.5
4. The special teacher treats you with more understanding and acceptance than your regular teachers.	5.48	4.6	3.4	9.2	6.9	16.1	17.2	42.5
5. You would like to have a special teacher assist you in all of your subjects.	4.48	19.5	3.4	9.2	8.0	21.8	12.6	25.3

Item	Mean Value	Percent Categories of Responses						
		Never		Seldom		Occasionally		Always
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Teacher Relationships (Special) (continued)								
6. You would like to have a special teacher assist you in some of your subjects.	4.79	8.0	3.8	15.8	4.5	25.0	11.4	28.4
7. The special teacher has helped you to recognize and cope with your problems.	4.96	10.3	2.3	13.8	3.4	24.1	16.1	29.9
8. The special teacher talks down to you.	1.94	68.2	8.0	6.8	4.5	5.7	4.5	2.3
9. You have trouble talking to your special teacher about your problems.	3.02	46.0	6.9	6.9	12.6	6.9	8.0	12.6
Family Relationships								
1. You think that your parents compare you with your brothers and sisters at school.	2.87	54.1	2.4	5.9	11.8	4.7	8.2	12.9
2. Your parents expect too much from you in your school work.	3.13	40.9	5.7	14.8	9.1	10.2	5.7	13.6
3. You are satisfied with the support your parents show toward your effort at school.	5.11	12.5	4.5	5.7	8.0	18.2	8.0	43.2
4. You wish your parents would react differently to your learning problems.	3.20	35.6	11.5	14.9	3.4	14.9	8.0	11.5
5. You feel that you get along well with your brothers and sisters at home.	5.00	14.9	3.4	8.0	5.7	14.9	13.8	39.1
6. You feel your parents really like you as a person.	5.67	5.7	3.4	8.0	6.9	9.2	9.2	57.5
7. You feel that you must compete in school with other members of your family.	2.95	44.8	8.0	12.6	8.0	8.0	4.6	13.8
8. You rarely become angry with your parents about problems or issues regarding school.	3.71	30.7	5.7	14.8	8.0	15.6	5.7	21.6

Item	Mean Value	Percent Categories of Responses						
Learning and Related Activities		Never 1	2	Seldom 3	4	Occasionally 5	6	Always 7
1. You daydream frequently in school when you should be studying.	3.96	17.0	9.1	22.7	5.7	20.5	6.8	18.2
2. You have problems changing from one activity to another.	3.19	33.0	11.4	15.9	9.1	17.0	1.1	12.5
3. You have difficulty focusing in on one task or activity.	3.18	25.0	17.0	19.3	9.1	18.2	5.7	5.7
4. You have a short attention span in your school work.	3.68	18.2	12.5	18.2	15.9	15.9	8.0	11.4
5. You get tired easily when you have to study	4.23	19.3	5.7	13.6	9.1	17.0	15.9	19.3
6. You frequently get angry at yourself about your school-work	3.94	21.6	5.7	18.2	6.8	22.7	9.1	15.9
7. You have trouble doing some of the physical activities you would like to do.	3.23	38.6	8.0	11.4	10.2	12.5	3.4	15.9
8. You have problems remembering what you see such as new words or room numbers.	3.50	28.4	8.0	17.0	9.1	18.2	8.0	11.4
9. You have problems remembering what you hear such as following oral directions.	3.85	21.6	9.1	13.6	12.5	18.2	11.4	13.6
10. Other students call you names or tease you because you have difficulty in school.	2.02	59.1	14.8	9.1	8.0	4.5	0.0	4.5
11. You often become frustrated because of your learning problems.	3.47	27.3	8.0	18.2	6.8	23.9	8.0	8.0
12. You have a difficult time stopping an activity when you should begin another.	3.58	22.7	11.4	18.2	10.2	18.2	9.1	10.2
13. You have a tendency to make decisions too quickly.	4.05	16.1	6.9	21.8	11.5	16.1	9.2	18.4
14. You tend to give up easily on school assignments.	3.94	25.0	8.0	11.4	4.5	20.5	15.9	14.8

Item	Mean Value	Percent Categories of Responses						
		Never		Seldom		Occasionally		Always
Learning and Related Activities (continued)		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
15. You often feel confused about your schoolwork.	4.38	10.2	8.0	17.0	11.4	21.6	14.8	17.0
16. You skip classes when work becomes too difficult.	3.05	40.9	12.5	13.6	7.3	8.0	9.1	13.6
17. You think you will be a successful person in the future.	5.57	6.9	3.4	2.3	4.6	21.8	17.2	43.7
18. You are absent from school frequently.	2.81	35.6	16.1	21.8	2.3	13.8	2.3	8.0
19. You have trouble making up your mind when you have to make a decision.	3.97	17.0	8.0	19.3	13.6	17.0	8.0	17.0
20. You hold your feelings in when you get made.	4.11	21.6	9.1	13.6	5.7	14.8	12.5	22.7
21. You try to establish principles and ideals for yourself.	4.59	10.3	2.3	10.3	16.1	34.5	8.0	18.4
22. You skip classes more often when you are angry or upset about that class.	3.25	34.1	13.6	13.6	5.7	12.5	5.7	14.8
23. You get along better with special class students than with regular students.	3.62	22.7	10.2	12.5	19.3	15.9	10.2	9.1